FUNDE NU. 51-4AA

COUNTRY Bulgaria

SUBJECT Railway Accidents

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

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SECURITY INFORMATION

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- 1. On 23 December 1951, a passenger train collided with a freight train carrying cement on the single-track standard European gauge Trans-Balkan line between Flachkovtsi (XN-1166) and Tryavna (XN-1470). The passenger train engineer was unable to stop in time to avoid the collision because the train's brakes were defective, having only a half-ton capacity instead of the 3-ton capacity required for safety. The engineer had pointed out that the brakes were defective before starting and had refused to sign the certificate of rail worthiness of the locomotive; nevertheless, in the interests of "shock work", he was forced to drive the train as scheduled. The accident, in which 180 people were killed, is the worst rail disaster ever experienced in Bulgaria.
- 2. During late January 1952, a trial (no details of which have been released to the press) was held in Sofia. The trial involved some 20 Bulgarian railway engineers on the charge of sabotage during the construction of the Voluyak (XL-2970) Dimitrovo (Pernik, XL-1052) railway line; the line was completed in 1949. The railway, a single-track standard-gauge line, was built to provide an alternate route for coal trains from Dimitrovo to Sofia, since the freight traffic was overloading the existing line which is also the only passenger link with the Styma Valley. The passenger railway is a single-track standard European gauge line and runs through the steeply-graded Vladaya Gorge.
- 3. The Voluyak Dimitrovo project envisaged a line to the west of the Lyulin Hills. Competent Bulgarian railway engineers had always maintained that the project was not worth attempting because of the difficulty of the terrain. Nevertheless, the Communist authorities persisted, but, with their obsession for quick results, would not allow time for embankments and the railbed to settle and be properly packed before laying the rails. Continuous subsiding

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·	has resulted, and the line has never been properly in order since its completion. At present, only empty coal trains returning to Dimitrovo from Sofia use the line because the railbed cannot carry heavy loads without grave risk of further subsiding. No passenger trains use the route.
4.	The recent trial was held against this background, the accused merely being scapegoats for short-sighted planning. Engineers Koev, Ganchev, Sakelarov, and one other were condemned to death and the remainder of the accused persons were sentenced to long terms of imprisonment.
5X1	Comment: The accused persons may be identical with the following personalities:
	a. Vasil Koev: An engineer who was appointed Assistant Minister of Con- struction and Roads in January 1948;
	b. Yordan Nikolov Ganchev: An engineer who was Director of Energohidroproe (Hydroelectric Project) at the Ministry of Electrification in November 1 when listed as a technical witness at the Kostov trial; and
	c. Manuel Sakolarov: Minister of Construction and Roads December 1947 - August 1949 when arrested in connection with the Kostov trial; was sentenced to 10 years imprisonment on 2 May 1951 for "sabotaging industry and inflicting heavy losses on the national economy."
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